

You know that dilemma over how long to wait before surreptitiously throwing away some piece of abstract "art" one of your children lovingly presents to you?

Well, unlike for some members of my household, it's not usually much of a dilemma for me. Typically, I keep such items for a couple of days or until the next garbage pickup, whichever comes first.

An unusual Valentine's Day gift from Lucy, however, has taken me completely off guard. The piece consists of a wooden chopstick drilled through the bottom of a 12-ounce clear plastic cup. Taped to the end of the chopstick are a pair of paper lips. The apparatus, a "kissing machine," is operated by pushing the chopstick through the hole in the bottom of the cup until the paper lips extend beyond the top of the cup and come in contact with the real lips of a loved one. The thing's been sitting around the house for over a month and I just can't bring myself to chuck it—probably because of the "I Love Dad from Lucy" scrawled on the side of the cup. Maybe Lucy will bury me with it.

I've started referring to Lucy as "Violet," after the inventive girl in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. It doesn't seem to bother her. What does bother her is when she undertakes to construct an obstacle course in the backyard—as she did last night—but her friends decide they'd rather play soccer instead. Boy, was she mad. I think she's gotten over it now, though.

Hannah is "Klaus," after the bookwormy kid in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. But she does stuff, too. Her science fair project earlier this month measured the effect of different solvents on different rocks. Or something. I'll try to remember to cram a picture of it onto Page Deux.

Grace turned two this month; an event we celebrated at home with Grandma/pa, Pete, and Coco. It's taken me four kids to figure out that the second birthday is really the first birthday where the honoree seems to get a sense that "there's something special about me today." It was fun watching Grace slowly come to that realization as she was presented with gift after gift. She's a very precocious girl, exhibiting two-year-old behavior several months in advance of her actual birthday. (And I don't mean that in a good way.) One positive: She sings a lot. Her bedroom adjoins ours, and at times Crystal will shush me from yelling at the TV so she can figure out what Grace is singing in her bed. Her favorites include "I Am a Child of God", the Alpha-

bet song, and various VeggieTales numbers.

The month's other big birthday was Uncle Pete's 24th, which we celebrated in grand style with all the Maryland/DC relatives. I think we now number 27. The cake had nuts in it, but otherwise it was a great party.

Pete celebrated his birthday proper (the day before the party) with lunch at McDonald's. He could've gone anywhere. He chose McDonald's. What can I say, he's retarded. And so ended my ambitious New Year's resolution not to eat there. I made it to March 23, which I think is a personal record for New Year's resolutions. (Now, if I could just get down to less than two gyros a week from the neighborhood deli, I might actually be a healthy person.)

My quest to eat better is often hindered by members of my own family, as evidenced by this conversation this morning:

**Sophie:** Mom, can we go to McDonald's for lunch?

**Lucy** (Interrupting): The worst restaurant in the world is spelled m-c-d-o-n-a-l-d-s

**Sophie:** But at McDonald's you get a toy.

**Lucy:** An adjective for those toys is c-r-a-p-p-y.

At least I have Lucy on my side. For what it's worth, I've started running in the morning again. We'll see how long that lasts.

I have to run to the Metro in a couple of minutes to pick up Hannah, who should be returning from her Junior Press Corps field trip downtown to the National Museum of Natural History and the National Geographic Museum. I'm not sure what any of this has to do with the press corps. But, apparently, some press corps member's dad works at the Natural History Museum and just brought back some weird fish from the Galapagos Islands. Or something. Right now, I'm just hoping that Hannah's going to be at the Metro when I get there. Crystal got mad at me this morning when she learned that I deposited Hannah at the Metro without making sure there was a responsible adult present. What can I say, I'm retarded.

It'll mark Hannah's second trip into the city this month. The first was with the rest of us to walk around the monuments and take the girls up the Washington Monument for the first time. (Amazing they've lived here all their lives and had never been up.) Lucy's fear of heights resurfaced, but we all survived. Scroll down for photos.

I'm really looking forward to General Conference weekend and not having to do anything on Sunday.

Have a nice April. Have a nice baseball season.





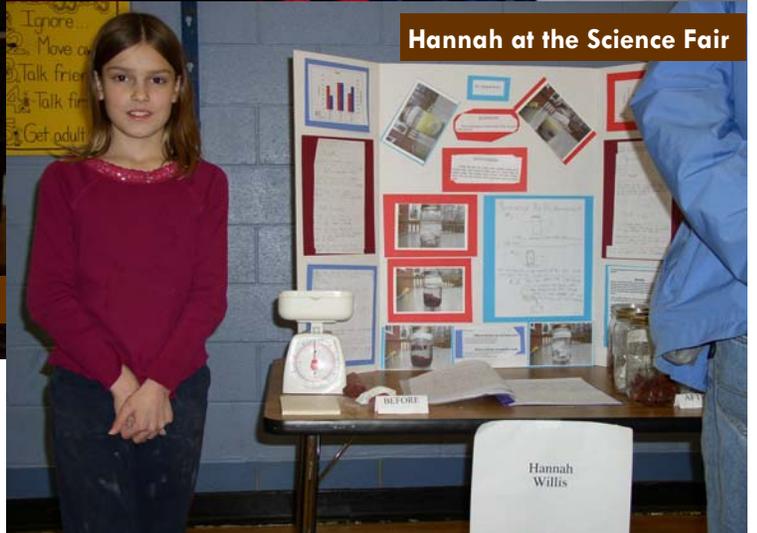
*These two pictures of Hannah and Lucy are taken from virtually the same spot, facing opposite directions. Above is (obviously) the Lincoln Memorial. At right is the reflecting pool, which, for some reason, had no water in it that day. Nevertheless, ice skating is expressly forbidden.*



**Sophie, Lucy and Abe**



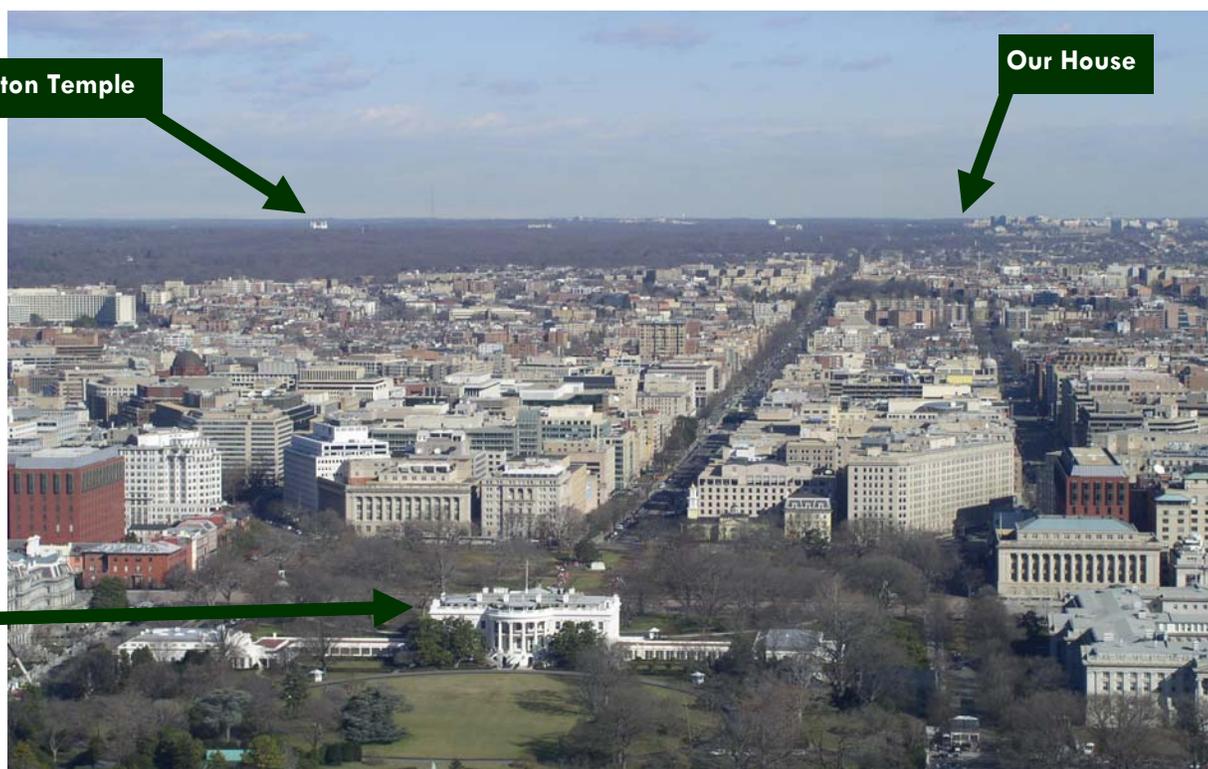
**Happy 2nd Birthday, Grace, from Aunt Coco and Uncle Pete.**



**Hannah at the Science Fair**



Grace at the Washington Monument, and the back of her father's ugly melon.  
(I like the way the sun highlights the little devil horns on top of her head. You can just tell she's about to do *something*.)



The View North from Atop the Washington Monument